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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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MAY 25 1993

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Polk County Courthouse

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number block bounded by US411, Ward, Commerce & Main Sts. n/a not for publication

city or town Benton n/a vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Polk code 139 zip code 37307

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Hays 5/19/93  
 Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer/ Tennessee Historical Commission  
 State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Stelton Byers

Entered in the  
National Register

6/24/93

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
1		structures
	1	objects
2	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: courthouse

LANDSCAPE: street furniture

RECREATION/CULTURE: monument/marker

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: courthouse

LANDSCAPE: street furniture

RECREATION/CULTURE: monument/marker

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other METAL

WOOD

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
XX C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is: N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

c1880--wall
1937--courthouse

Significant Dates

c1880--wall
1937--courthouse

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hunt, R. H. and Company--architect
Forcum-James Company--contractors
Emergency Administration for Public Works

Primary location of additional data:

- XX State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Polk County Courthouse  
Name of Property

Polk County, Tennessee  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Benton, TN 126 NW

1 

1	6	7	1	3	7	1	0	3	8	9	4	5	9	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

3 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

2 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

4 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Karen L. Daniels/Historic Preservation Planner

organization Southeast Tennessee Development District date March 1993

street & number P. O. Box 4757 telephone 615/266-5781

city or town Chattanooga state Tennessee zip code 37405-0757

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Polk County, c/o Hoyt Firestone, County Executive

street & number P. O. box 128 telephone 615/338-4527

city or town Benton state Tennessee zip code 37307

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1 Polk County Courthouse  
Polk County, Tennessee

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### Description

The Polk County Courthouse, in Benton, Polk County, Tennessee is a two story plus raised basement, Art Deco influenced style building designed by the firm of R. H. Hunt and Company, and completed in 1937. The building was constructed with funds from the Federal Emergency Administration for Public Works.

The cruciform plan building is constructed of cream colored brick on a stone foundation. A stone cornice caps the parapet walls on the main block of the building, corbelled brick caps the walls on the side wings of the building. The windows are metal casements surrounded by fixed lights. Painted metal spandrel panels are located between the first and second story windows; basement windows are awning type.

There are central entrances on each of the four facades of the building. Around the south, west and north facades there are recessed entries with stone around the door and second story window. On the east facade there is a stone surround around the door only. The original entrance doors have been replaced with glass and steel double leaf doors. There are stone steps attached to the building on the south, west and north sides. The windows above the entries are awning type surrounded by fixed lights.

The entrance on the main (west) facade opens to the first story of the building. The doorway is recessed into the wall and has stone spandrels. "Polk County Courthouse" is carved in relief above the doors. The stone parapet roof steps slightly on the main facade at the center where a flag pole is located.

The north and south facades have entrances leading onto a landing between the basement and first story. The windows on the stair landing between the first and second story are metal awning windows surrounded by fixed lights.

The rear (east) facade has an entry to the basement level. It has a stone door surround. The second story windows in the east facade, and in the rear part of the south facade have been covered with metal panels to provide privacy to the courtroom.

The lot surrounding the building is above street level, and a stone retaining wall surrounds the lot. The wall is believed to have been built circa 1880 at the time the third courthouse was constructed. Stone steps approach each of the entrance doors, and steps at the southeast corner lead to a marble memorial to veterans of World Wars I and II, dedicated in 1949 by the local

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2 Polk County Courthouse  
Polk County, Tennessee

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chapters of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The interior of the courthouse has had some alterations although most of the original design and materials remain. Original features include the terrazzo tile floors, the plaster and marble walls, the vaulted plaster ceilings, the marble wainscotting and stair balustrades, the terrazzo stairs, and the interior wooden doors, some with glass panels, some with solid wood doors.

The original interior layout of the building remains essentially unaltered, the second story courtroom retains its original furnishings including the judge's bench, jury box and spectators gallery.

Most of the offices retain original walls, ceilings and flooring. The first story and second story have a central hall plan with offices or court space on each side of the hall. The first story has a marble walled lobby at the main entrance with a short flight of marble stairs leading to the central hallway and marble columns on the opposite side of the hallway in front of county offices. Several offices are located on each side of the hallway.

On the second story the courtroom is centered in the rear of the building with offices for the judges and court clerks opposite. There marble wainscotting, terrazzo tile floors and plaster walls and ceilings in the halls and offices, with wooden wainscotting and plaster walls and ceilings in the courtroom.

The basement contains offices related to county government. The basement has a central hall running north/south which is intersected by a hallway leading to the rear doors. Offices line all these hallways. The offices have wooden wainscotting, with plaster walls and ceilings, and terrazzo or carpeted floors. The halls have terrazzo flooring and marble and plaster walls, and a plaster ceiling.

The only interior feature of the building which has been widely changed is the electrical lighting, which was changed from milk glass globes to fluorescent fixtures.

The Polk County Courthouse, constructed in 1937, has had few alterations made to it. The only non-extant features of the building are the original wooden entrance doors and the original lighting fixtures. Some offices have had small alterations made, mostly in the form of carpeted floors.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3 Polk County Courthouse  
Polk County, Tennessee

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### Significance

The Polk County Courthouse in Benton, Polk County, Tennessee is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C for its significance in architecture. The courthouse is the only building constructed by a depression relief agency, other than the Civilian Conservation Corps, which is extant. This building was designed by the R. H. Hunt and Company architectural firm of Chattanooga, Tennessee. The building is significant to the county architectural history as one of the lasting examples of federal relief architecture, and also as the most visible example of the federal relief projects, the other projects in the county were mostly Civilian Conservation Corps camps which were small in scale and which were temporary in nature.

Polk County was formed in 1839 by act of the Tennessee legislature from parts of McMinn and Bradley Counties. For one year the county seat was located in Columbus, on the Conasauga creek.

The land that is now covered by Benton had been settled circa 1838 by a farmer, James McKamy. The old Federal Road ran by his property. Also in the area was James Linder and his wife Barbara. They provided shelter for cattle drovers herding cattle from southern states to southern Kentucky.

The legislation that created Polk County declared that the county seat was to be called Benton, in honor of Thomas Hart Benton. The McKamy farm site was selected as the town site because of several springs which provided water.

In 1839-1840 McKamy and John F. Hannah surveyed and laid out 223 lots for the town of Benton. These lots were sold by public auction in 1840 and \$11386.00 was raised by their sale.

The existing courthouse is the fourth to be constructed on the courthouse square. The first quarterly court of Polk County met in a temporary courthouse constructed on the site in August 1840.

In 1851 a two story, brick courthouse was completed on the site. This building housed county offices on the first floor and a courtroom on the second floor. The building was destroyed by fire in 1894.

It took three years for the next courthouse to be completed. To raise money for the construction of the building, the county solicited subscriptions. The Wetmore family offered the county free land if the courthouse was

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Section number 8 Page 4 Polk County Courthouse  
Polk County, Tennessee

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constructed at Wetmore in the northern part of the county. The heirs of Julius Raht made the same offer if the courthouse was constructed at Parksville, on the Ocoee River.

The two story, Colonial Revival style, courthouse was completed in 1897, on Benton's courthouse square. This building served until destroyed by a fire on December 2, 1935. Fire companies were called in from neighboring communities but the fire could not be controlled. County officials estimated that constructing a new courthouse would cost \$40,000.

The Emergency Relief Administration of Public Works provided a partial grant for constructing the new courthouse, the building cost \$100,000 to construct. The design for the new building was done by the Chattanooga architectural firm of R. H. Hunt and Company, the company had earlier designed the Kimsey Junior College building in another part of the county (NR 9/2/1992). The building was designed in a simplified Art Deco style.

The Polk County Courthouse is the only courthouse in extreme southeast Tennessee constructed during the depression. In neighboring Bradley and McMinn Counties the courthouses were constructed before the 1900, the existing courthouses in these counties were constructed in the 1960s (Bradley) and the 1970s (McMinn). The nearest courthouse constructed about the same time is the federal courthouse in Chattanooga, which is a much more ornate example of the Art Deco style.

The R. H. Hunt and Company firm was very active in the southeastern states, specializing in designing churches, public buildings, and university buildings. The firm was founded at the turn of the century by Rueben H. Hunt, who had been practicing architecture in the Chattanooga area since 1882, upon his death in 1937 his son Benjamin F. Hunt took over the firm. The commissions of R. H. Hunt and Company in southeast Tennessee included numerous churches and university buildings, and public buildings like the Hamilton County, Tennessee Courthouse (NR 11/21/1978), the U. S. Post Office and Courthouse in Chattanooga (NR 2/29/1980), the Chattanooga Public Library (NR 3/14/1973), the Chattanooga High School, the Kimsey Junior College (NR 9/2/1992) and the Polk County Courthouse.

Little construction was occurring in the county during the depression, the agricultural and industrial base of much of the county was not capable of expansion, and large federal ownership of land (in the Cherokee National Forest, and the lands held by the Tennessee Valley Authority) reduced the county tax base. The courthouse and the several Civilian Conservation Corp camps were a large part of the new construction occurring in the area.



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Polk County, Tennessee

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## Bibliography

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Polk County Courthouse  
Polk County, Tennessee

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## Boundary Description & Justification

The Polk County Courthouse is bounded by US411, Main Street, Ward Street and Commerce Street. It is identified on accompanying Benton, Polk County tax map 45-D as batch A lot 6.

This encompasses the historic courthouse square which has been associated with the various courthouses in Benton.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Photo \_\_\_\_\_ Page 7 Polk County Courthouse  
Polk County, Tennessee

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### Photo Log

Polk County Courthouse  
Benton, Polk County, Tennessee  
Photo by: Karen L. Daniels  
Date: January 1993  
Neg: Tennessee Historical Commission  
Nashville, Tennessee

#1 of 10  
Main (West) facade, center.

#2 of 10  
Main (West) facade.

#3 of 10  
South facade.

#4 of 10  
Southeast corner and war memorial.

#5 of 10  
East facade.

#6 of 10  
North facade.

#7 of 10  
Main lobby, first floor.

#8 of 10  
Corridor, first floor.

#9 of 10  
South stairwell between first and second stories.

#10 of 10  
Corridor, basement

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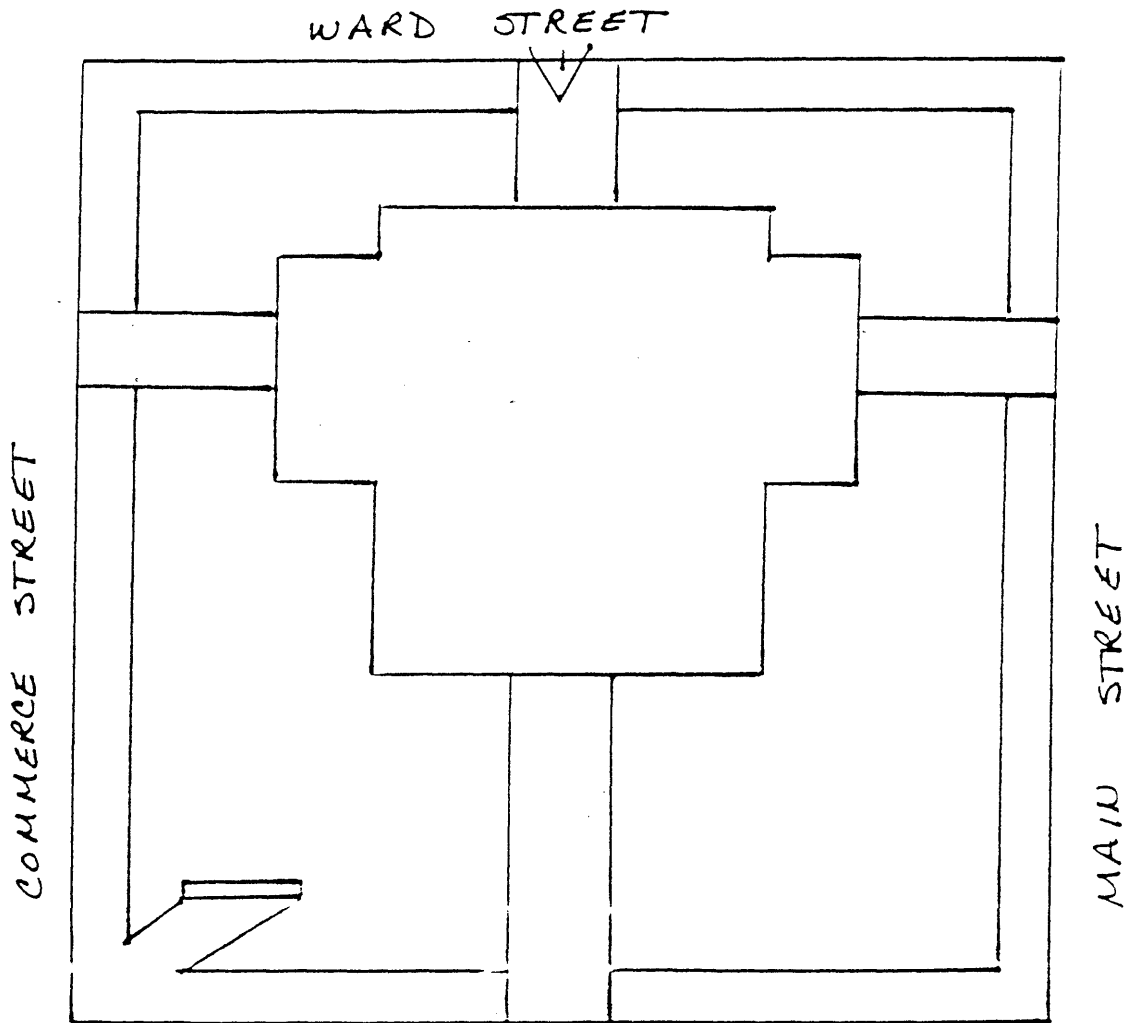
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Polk County Courthouse  
Polk County, Tennessee

3

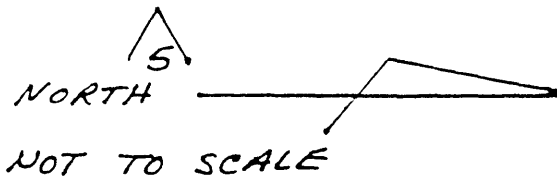
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4

US 411

4





↑ Polk County Courthouse  
 Polk County - TN  
 BENTON  
 POLK COUNTY  
 1" = 100'  
 MAP NO.